9 September 2004

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Committee on Conferences
Substantive session of 2004

Draft report

Rapporteur: Mr. Mu'taz **Hyassat** (Jordan)

I. Organizational matters

A. Membership

1. The General Assembly, in its resolution 43/222 B of 21 December 1988, decided to retain the Committee on Conferences as a permanent subsidiary organ. Pursuant to the provisions of that resolution, in 2004 the Committee was composed of the following Member States: Argentina, Austria, Bolivia, Congo, Ethiopia, France, Germany, India, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Mexico, Nepal, Nigeria, Romania, the Russian Federation, Senegal, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, the United States of America and Zambia.

B. Officers

2. At its organizational session for 2004, the Committee elected the following officers to serve in 2004:

Chairman:
Enno Drofenik (Austria)

Vice-Chairpersons:
Norma Taylor Roberts (Jamaica)
Saleh Manu Pisagih (Nigeria)
Laura Onisii (Romania)

Rapporteur:
Mohammad Tal (Jordan)

At its substantive session, the Committee elected Mu'taz Hyassat (Jordan) to replace Mr. Tal.

3. At the same session, the Committee agreed in principle that the Chairman would undertake informal consultations with a view to determining the composition of the Committee's Bureau in 2005.

C. Organization of work

4. At its organizational session (456th meeting), the Committee agreed to follow the guidelines adopted in 1994 and 1995 with regard to consideration of intersessional departures from the approved calendar of conferences and to meet, as required, to review proposals affecting the schedule of conferences and meetings during sessions of the General Assembly.

5. The Committee convened its substantive session on 7, 8 and 10 September 2004 (457th to 462nd meetings).

6. The Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management addressed the Committee at the opening of its organizational and substantive sessions. At the substantive session, he introduced the report of the Secretary-General on reform of the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (A/59/172).

7. The report of the Secretary-General on the pattern of conferences (A/59/159) was introduced by the Assistant Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management. The consolidation into one report of all matters of a technical nature, an innovation in 2002, was continued this year.

D. Programme of work

8. At its organizational session for 2003, held on 22 April 2003, the Committee had requested the Secretariat to submit a draft agenda for 2004 to the Committee at its organizational session for 2004. At the 456th meeting, on 25 March 2004, the Committee adopted the proposed agenda (A/AC.172/2004/1) and requested the Secretariat to submit a draft agenda for 2005 to the Committee at its organizational session for 2005.

9. In order to provide more relevant advice to the General Assembly, the Committee decided to recommend for adoption by the Assembly a draft resolution reflecting the substantive discussion that took place in the Committee, thereby facilitating the consideration of the items by the Assembly.

E. Participation of observers

10. The following States were represented as observers: Canada, China, the Dominican Republic, Portugal, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Holy See.

F. Biennialization of the item entitled "Pattern of conferences" in the agenda of the General Assembly

Introduction and overview

11. At its 460th meeting, on 8 September 2004, the Committee on Conferences considered paragraphs 56 to 60 of the report of the Secretary-General on pattern of conferences (A/59/159), which included an assessment of the possibility of biennializing the item entitled "Pattern of conferences" in the agenda of the General Assembly. The representative of the Secretariat reported that biennialization appeared to be possible and practical and in accordance with the overall revitalization of the work of the Assembly. It was desirable because statistical trends resulting from organizational and methodological changes needed longer periods of time to become noticeable. It was envisaged that the Committee would continue to meet annually, continuing to biennialize its consideration of certain items. Approval of the revised calendar of conferences for the second year of the biennium could be considered by the Assembly in non-budget years under a limited agenda item, or the responsibility could be delegated to the Committee.

Discussion

12. Several delegations expressed support for recommending biennialization of the item to the General Assembly in the interest of greater efficiency, since the effects of reform could be better seen at two-year intervals. However, it was pointed out that the Committee itself had not truly biennialized its agenda items, but continued to consider all topics every year. The view was expressed that, because of the importance of conference services and the issue of multilingualism, the item merited consideration by the Assembly every year. It was felt that it was premature to consider biennialization in the midst of reform, when new experiments were constantly being undertaken and required review.